



Coast Guard Flag Voice 09

DELAYS TO ENLISTED ADVANCEMENT RESULTS

When I put out [Flag Voice 7](#) on recent delays to officer promotion boards, Master Chief Patton asked me, "What about our enlisted members? They always have to wait a considerable time before their service-wide exam (SWE) results and advancement lists with cut-offs are published."

First, let me explain some of the differences between the two systems. "Different" means just that - one is not necessarily better than the other. Each is designed for a particular set of outcomes and, consequently, each has different impacts on careers. The SWE competition essentially is open to all enlisted members. Additionally, if you compete and are not high enough on the list to advance in the current round, then there is a next time. One exception is for those who will be exceeding their High Year Tenure (HYT) professional growth point (PGP). By applying yourself, you conceivably can substantially improve your chances for advancement during the next or subsequent cycles. You can improve your final multiple (calculation based on a number of factors) by acquiring award points and improving your evaluations. You also obtain additional points for added experience (time in grade). Enlisted members who truly desire to advance and apply themselves have an excellent opportunity to achieve E-9 during a 30-year career. The overall average time across ratings to advance to E-9 is just under 20 years. On the other hand, the officer promotion system from LT on up is a "best qualified" board system (no calculations) with decreasing opportunities of selection (OOS). For example, during the last cycle the OOS for CDR was 71% and for CAPT 62%. In other words, only 71% of those competing the first time for CDR could be selected; similarly only 62% of those competing the first time could be selected for CAPT. For anyone with more than 20 years' service, twice non-selected means mandatory retirement. Hence, promotion board outcomes have a substantial impact on an officer's career, sometimes terminating highly capable people "before their time" and obviously creating considerable anxiety during the process. There are no SWE competitions for officers. They compete for promotion based solely on their record of performance. Time in grade determines eligibility.

Now, why does it take considerable time to get the enlisted advancement lists out? Since these are processed "automatically" through number crunching, you would think we should be able to turn them out rapidly. However, there are both "legitimate" delays and "unnecessary" delays in receiving and processing all the varied information necessary to compute the lists - which we prefer to do only once each cycle. No one likes an inaccurate list - one that has to be pulled back and revised (some may remember what happened with the September 1992 SWE!). Simply running all the numbers through the HRSIC computer doesn't take much time. Some "legitimate" delays in receiving all the SWEs back at Topeka on time are operational commitments (cutters on patrol, natural or manmade disaster response), substitute SWE administration, and "challenges" to SWE questions subject matter experts must evaluate. "Unnecessary" delays include requiring substitute exams (due to no fault of the member, the command fails to properly follow the correct procedures), failure to return the exams expeditiously, and failure to complete performance evaluations. Preparing and processing the Enlisted Performance Evaluation Forms (EPEFs) accurately and swiftly play a critical role in the advancement process, especially in computing eligibility and the final multiple.

Unfortunately, each cycle we experience a large number of late returns, typically exceeding 200. We can't begin to produce the lists until we get them all in. Given the thousands of members who compete each cycle, this becomes a massive task. This entire process takes about 3 months. We estimate if we received all evaluations on time, we could publish the lists 2 to 4 weeks earlier than we do now. A future Flag Voice will address the determination of the cut-offs.

I trust this helps to explain the differences in our officer and enlisted promotion/advancement systems. I ask all commands to be especially aware of the sources of delay with the enlisted SWE competition and focus on their part in reducing the "unnecessary" delays. If we understand the importance of accurate, timely performance evaluations for our people, we'll go a long way in improving the system. I thank you in advance!

Regards, FL Ames



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